THE QUEER USE OF COMMUNAL WOMEN IN BORGES' "EL MUERTO" AND "LA INTRUSA"

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Jorge Luis Borges' two stories, "El muerto" (1946) and "La intrusa" (1966), linked by common thematic and structural elements, form a complementary narrative duet. Considering the features that they share with respect to setting, character, and outcome, it seems only natural to place the two stories together for comparative purposes. The setting for both stories, for example, is located outside urban society, that is, on the plains of the Río de la Plata basin sometime during the 1890s. More importantly, the male characters in both stories, living out on the pampas, embody not only those qualities that Western culture has traditionally considered "masculine", such as strength, independence, and action, but also the stereotypically hyper-masculine traits of the "macho" male: the tyrannical use of power, the cruel subjugation of the other, and violence in the defense of honor. The outcome of both stories, in fact, is a cold-blooded murder. Due to the content in these stories of virile displays of violence and power, Gyurko and McMurray have placed "El muerto" and "La intrusa" into a category of Borgesian fiction that they call the "machismo code" or "macho cult" story. In addition to these thematic similarities is a very important shared structure which makes use of a communal female as a sexual pawn between two men. It is the narrative purpose and significance of this triangular structure in the two stories, the placement of one woman between two men, that I wish to examine in the present study.

This triangular configuration involving two males and one female in several stories, including "El muerto" and "La intrusa," has been noted by Sharon Magnarelli in her 1983 study, "Literature and Desire: Women in the Fiction of Jorge Luis Borges." Following René Girard's conceptualization of "triangular desire," Magnarelli states that in Borges, "desire is dependent upon a triangular relationship: the object of desire (O) is desirable to one individual (A) to the extent that it is desired by another (B)." She notes, further, that in such a case, "the object of desire (O) is an empty receptacle needing to be filled with what is projected upon it by the subjects of that desire (A and/or B)" (143).[1] In the context of English literature, Sedgwick, too, employs Girard's theory of triangular desire in her 1985 study, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. Whereas Magnarelli almost completely ignores the issue of homoerotic desire between the men in the triangle, Sedgwick finds that the link between two men that is expressed through desire for the same woman, their "rivalry," is an interaction that is characterized by a complex combination of factors involving the nature and intensity of *the "desire" one man has for another man*. As a result, Sedgwick concludes that all male-male relationships may be charted on a continuum between the two poles of the homosocial and the homosexual.

Pursuing Sedgwick's conceptualizations in the work of Jorge Luis Borges, I contend that "El muerto" and "La intrusa" both exemplify, in quite different ways, how the desire of the males in a triangular relationship implies a much deeper and more intimate connection between the men themselves, one that is not simply homosocial, but also, as I will demonstrate, fundamentally *queer*.[2] By using a communal woman, the male characters in these two stories take a powerful step to forge a bond with another male, a bond that crosses the delicate boundary between the homosocial and the homosexual. The triangular structure in these two stories permits a male character to connect with another male by means of sexual intercourse with a woman as the intermediary focal point at/in which two men may coincide and conjoin. As a result, in "El muerto" and "La intrusa," different-sex intercourse actually loses its traditional

heterosexual value and becomes, paradoxically, a strategic queer maneuver to fulfill homoerotic desire.[3]

Although "El muerto" and "La intrusa" share a common triangular relationship among the characters, it is fascinating to see how this same structure has very distinct purposes and can produce radically different outcomes. In "El muerto," for example, one man desires to coincide with another and through the communal woman, the two men are connected in a way that creates a shift in masculine authority, leading the second man to seek revenge on the first for his transgression of the male homosocial power dynamic. Originally published in *Sur* (1946) and later collected in the first edition of *El Aleph* (1949), "El muerto" is the story of a handsome young *compadrito* from Buenos Aires, Benjamín Otálora, who has killed a man and must leave the country. He heads for Uruguay with a letter of introduction for Azevedo Bandeira, a local *caudillo*. While searching for this Bandeira, he participates in a knife-fight and blocks a lethal blow intended for the man he discovers later to be Bandeira himself. Having earned Bandeira's trust and gratitude, Otálora joins his band of gaucho smugglers. Little by little, Otálora becomes more greedy and ambitious, taking more risks, making more decisions, and befriending Bandeira's body guard, Ulpiano Suárez, to whom he reveals his secret plan to take Bandeira's place as leader of the group. The plan is the result of his desire to possess Bandeira's most important symbols of power: his horse, his saddle, and his woman with the bright red hair. One day, after a skirmish with a rival band of Brazilians, Otálora is wounded and on that day, he rides Bandeira's horse back to the ranch, spills blood on the saddle, and sleeps with the woman. The end of the story occurs on New Year's Eve in 1894 when, after a day of feasting and drinking, at the stroke of Midnight, Bandeira summons his mistress and brutally forces her to kiss Otálora in front of all the men. As Suárez aims his pistol, Otálora realizes before he dies that he had been set up from the very beginning and that he had been permitted the pleasure of power and triumph because in the end, to Bandeira, he never was anything more than a soon-to-be dead man.

Most criticism regarding this story emphasizes the view that in this tale, as in similar stories such as "La muerte y la brújula," Borges is presenting the reader with a cautionary tale on the inherent foolishness and absurdity of the human presumption that we are in control of our own destinies or that we are in a position to change our fates through plans and schemes (Alazraki 19, McMurray 21, Bell-Villada 182, Carter 14). The striking consensus among most critics regarding the theme of "El muerto" is that Otálora, because of his arrogant efforts to replace a superior leader, is punished by death because of his ambition, greed, and pride.

With the exception of Sylvia Molloy's insightful study of "El muerto" in her 1979 *Signs of Borges*, what has gone unnoticed and uncommented in the critical discourse is that Otálora's covetousness and greed is not aimed merely at possessing Bandeira's political authority and social prestige, but extends to a desire to possess his masculine power and, indeed, his male personhood. As Molloy suggests, Otálora comes to desire Bandeira because he want to be Bandeira, to "supplant" him (50). The desire for one man to be "inside" another man, to coincide with him, to possess him, to be him, moves far beyond mere envy and greed and becomes overtly homoerotic. In other words, Otálora's desire for Bandeira slips from the homosocial side of the "homosocial-homosexual continuum" over to the homosexual side when his lustful greed incorporates not only a desire to be like Bandeira, but also a desire to be linked to him through sexual union with a communal woman.

Otálora's desire for Bandeira, the desire to be in him and to see as he sees, to feel as he feels, to possess what he possesses, is insinuated by several elements in the text of the story: the descriptions of the characters as complementary opposites; Otálora's need to connect visually with the object of his desire; and finally, Otálora's hunger, or as Borges suggestively puts it, his "*infatuación* del coraje" (*Aleph* 41; my emphasis),[4] that is, his desire to take possession of Bandeira's symbolic objects of power, culminating in the sexual possession of the female as the ultimate act of queer desire. The description of the two central characters of the story who, as McMurray has noted, can be characterized as "antithetical doubles" (20), is striking: Otálora is a

strapping young man ("un mocetón") of Basque descent with light coloring, while, in contrast, the older Bandeira "da, aunque fornido, la injustificable impresión de ser contrahecho" and whose mixed ancestry of Portuguese Jew, African, and Native American underscores his darkly colored patchwork appearance (*Aleph* 42). Borges' well known predilection for contrast, antithesis, and paradox and his consistent use of the thematic union of opposites ("complexio oppositorum") should alert the reader immediately to a powerful attraction that will bind these two perfectly contrasted men.

Borges then forges a link that draws them together and unites them: the remarkably significant Borgesian facial scar. As Balderston (39) and I (33-34) have shown, the visible scar in the context of Borgesian fiction has the value of marking a man for all the world to see as one who is brave and manly on the outside, but whose macho exterior may be merely a mask disguising a deceitful and, therefore, feminine interior. In other words, a man whose wish to bond with other men has transgressed the limits of homosocial desire or, as Sedgwick puts it, a "man's man" who has become "interested in men" (89), is permanently branded by an object (a knife or sword) that symbolizes what he most desires (the phallus).

Another aspect of Otálora's desire for Bandeira is signaled from the very beginning of their association by the young man's intense need to see and be seen by the object of his passion. During his apprenticeship shortly after becoming a part of Bandeira's band of outlaws, it is noted in the text that Otálora is only able to see Bandeira once, but that "lo tiene muy presente." To add to the older man's desireability, Otálora is reminded by the others that Bandeira is the master and model ("ante cualquier hombrada, los gauchos dicen que Bandeira lo hace mejor") and Bandeira becomes, for Otálora, an absent, and therefore increasingly coveted object of desire. Otálora, in an attempt to get Bandeira to take special notice of him, to make Bandeira <u>see</u> him, wounds one of his gaucho *compañeros* in a fight and takes his place on a smuggling mission so that Bandeira will suddenly realize that "*yo valgo más que todos sus orientales juntos*" (*Aleph* 45; original emphasis). Borges notes, significantly, that Bandeira is motivated not only by

ambition but also by something else, “una *oscura* fidelidad” (*Aleph* 45), a force that carries the coded connotation of a forbidden or unnameable desire. Once he returns to the big house, the narrator again notes that "pasan los días y Otálora *no ha visto* a Bandeira" (*Aleph* 45; emphasis added). Otálora's desire for contact with Bandeira through the powerful, penetrating male-male gaze is an early indication of his longing to connect with the source of his infatuation.

As Otálora's hunger for Bandeira grows, he begins to crave several of Bandeira's possessions so that he can satisfy his desire through a metonymic ownership of the objects that have actually been in physical contact with Bandeira and which still retain the aura of his masculine power. The greediness on the part of Otálora to acquire Bandeira's most prized possessions serves as an expression of his desire to coincide with the actual physical person of Bandeira. When Otálora sees Bandeira's bedroom, the first objects that he notices are particularly symbolic for their traditional association with both masculine sexuality and the dominance/domination and violent power of the constructed male gender-role: "hay una larga mesa con un resplandeciente desorden de taleros, de arreadores, de cintos, de armas de fuego y de armas blancas" (*Aleph* 46). Otálora's interest in and appetite for these specifically *masculine* attributes of Bandeira is highlighted when he perceives them directly as they seem to give off light (they are "resplandeciente") while in contrast, when another of Bandeira's "objects," his mistress, enters the room barefoot and half naked, Otálora observes her indirectly and distantly, as a mere reflection in a mirror (*Aleph* 46). At this moment, the moment when Otálora first sees the woman in the mirror, the structure of triangular desire comes into play as a means for Otálora to realize his queer objective. The presence of the woman in this scene amid all the other objects that males use to wield power indicates that she will be used as the device necessary for Otálora to make a physical link to Bandeira and replace him.

Otálora focuses his desire on taking possession of the objects belonging to Bandeira that define him most as a masculine object of desire and that have the most intimate physical connection to him: the horse with its saddle and blanket, and, ultimately, the red-headed woman.

Otálora wants them with such intensity mainly because Bandeira has invested so much desire in them, or as Magnarelli puts it, "the objects are coveted because the prestige of Bandeira has been projected on them; they have no intrinsic value" (144). Indeed, Otálora does not desire the horse for its equine qualities, nor does he desire the mistress for her womanly qualities. As Rivero and others have noted, the woman in "El muerto" is not valued as a woman: "No tiene nombre ni voz. El sustantivo *mujer* la nombra y los epítetos la describen, destacando de su fría displicencia un solo rasgo vital y agresivo: el color fulgurante del cabello... [...] Esa mujer, al igual que el apero y el colorado, es uno de los símbolos del poder del jefe, cuyas posesiones son deseadas por Otálora, no por lo que son en sí sino por lo que representan como afirmación de una superioridad" (175-76). But although they do not possess an intrinsic value, they do indeed have an important functional one. Unlike other objects that symbolize Bandeira's power, the horse with its saddle and the woman are two things on/in which the two men can physically connect: when Otálora mounts first the horse, he is very close to fulfilling his desire to coincide with Bandeira. It is only later, when Otálora mounts the woman, that he succeeds, in effect, in mounting Bandeira himself in a symbolic act of male sexual penetration--a rape.[5] At the moment when Otálora takes possession of the woman, he and Bandeira are joined, marking the move from the homosocial to the homosexual by means of male-female intercourse.

Once he achieves his objective and comes into possession of all of Bandeira's most valued objects, Otálora enjoys his triumph at a New Year's Eve celebration. Otálora has fulfilled his desire to coincide with Bandeira, to connect with him indirectly through the body of the red-headed woman and although he does not know it yet, he must now die. Otálora's death is required, not simply because he was too ambitious and too greedy, taking control of things that he had no right to own, but because he has dared to force himself into the position of power in what Borges has called the "unimaginable contact"[6] between men that converts Bandeira into the so-called "passive" partner in a male-male sexual act. The affront that Bandeira must avenge is

his being penetrated by Otálora, that is, the humilliation that he finds himself in the shameful and *feminized* position of receptor in the relationship between them.

Bandeira's revenge takes place precisely when Otálora's pleasure and excitement are at its peak. In fact, the narrator's description gives the clear impression that Otálora has achieved a metaphorical erection, symbolizing his active, inserter role: "Otálora, borracho, *erige* exultación sobre exultación, júbilo sobre júbilo; esa *torre* de vértigo es un símbolo de su irresistible destino" (*Aleph* 49; emphasis added). As long as Otálora is alive, wielding his power as macho inserter, Bandeira cannot recover his role as the regional strongman. The narrator is careful to note that when Bandeira speaks at the end of the story, he speaks "con una voz que *se afemina* y se arrastra" (*Aleph* 50; emphasis added). Temporarily weakened by the feminized position in which Otálora has put him, Bandeira himself cannot wreak his vengeance on Otálora; that job is left to Suárez who symbolically and violently penetrates Otálora with a gunshot and consequently destroys the rival that had appropriated Bandeira's phallic power.

With the publication of "La intrusa" twenty years after "El muerto," Borges demonstrates his continued fascination for the triangular erotic structure he used in the earlier story. But in "La intrusa," however, Borges develops the structure to include a *reciprocal* homoerotic desire between two men who make use of a communal woman to satisfy their need for homoerotic contact. Their desire is actually stimulated by the presence of the woman and, rather than upsetting the male-male relationship, the use of the woman strengthens and solidifies it. "La intrusa" is the story told of two brothers, Cristián and Eduardo Nilsen, who were infamous for both their rough and brutal ways as well as their unusual closeness. According to the "legend," the incidents occur in the 1890s when the elder brother, Cristián, brings home a prostitute named Juliana Burgos.[7] When Eduardo "falls in love" with her, too, rather than starting a terrible fight, Cristián tells him to "use" her if he likes. Soon, their joint use of Juliana gives rise to an emotional tension between the two brothers and in order to resolve the conflict, Cristián decides

to sell Juliana to a brothel outside of town and share the money with his brother. Unfortunately, their need to share her continues as they both make trips to see her at the bordello. Cristián decides to buy Juliana back and take her home again. But the jealousy between the two brothers becomes worse. Finally, on a Sunday, Cristián tells Eduardo that they must take a trip to sell some skins. When they arrive at a deserted field, Cristián confesses that he has already killed Juliana and put an end to their disharmony. The brothers embrace, almost crying, linked even more closely by this "sacrifice."

In contrast to "El muerto," a story in which the queer content has generally gone unperceived by critics, "La intrusa" offers the reader as blatant a depiction of homoerotic desire as can be found in any of Borges' works. It is interesting to note the critical response to this story which, unlike the majority of Borges' tales, has occasioned quite widely divergent views with respect to its content and artistry. Some critics have found the story's content to be quite troubling, even alarming, and that the "directness" of the narration[8] seems to signal a clear break with Borges' earlier, that is, more accomplished and complex style.

It may be that what is most disturbing in this story is the undeniable homoeroticism between the Nilsen brothers. The question in this story of fraternal love that has crossed over on the homosocial-homosexual continuum to the homosexual side has been a contested issue since the story first appeared. For some critics, the homosexual implications of the Nilsen brothers' relationship is neutralized by Borges' use of a female intermediary,[9] while for others, she is the catalyst to a more physical bonding between the brothers. Lima's heterosexist view of the story,[10] however, indicates that there are those that cannot conceive of the possibility that fraternal bonds and sexual bonds can coincide, that brothers can also be lovers. And among those who could not imagine brothers as sexual partners was the author himself.[11] In fact, according to Emir Rodríguez Monegal and Alastair Reid, the tale is based on a real incident that Borges found necessary to modify: the "chief alteration was to make the protagonists brothers instead of close friends, to avoid any homosexual connotations. (Perhaps unwillingly, he added incest)" (361).

Estela Canto, too, states that when she discussed the story with Borges, "[l]e dije que el cuento me parecía básicamente homosexual. Creí que esto--él se alarmaba bastante de cualquier alusión en este sentido--iba a impresionarle. [...] Para él no había ninguna situación homosexual en el cuento. Continuó hablándome de la relación entre los dos hermanos, de la bravura de este tipo de hombres, etc." (230).

Despite Borges' strenuous objections, there is compelling evidence that the author willfully devised a contradictory message by simultaneously exposing and disguising the numerous queer elements in the text. The epigraph for the story, for example, indicated only by the chapter and verse designation "2 Reyes, I, 26," is a puzzle. As Balderston points out, this is one of Borges' clever deceptions to express and, at the same time, suppress the homosexual context he would establish for the story. The biblical reference that Borges gives is, as Woscoboinik has mentioned, a "picardía" that bashfully disguises its own content (129). Balderston explains that "[t]he first chapter of the second book of *Kings* does not have a twenty-sixth verse, but the second book of *Samuel*, sometimes also known as the second book of *Kings*, contains the most famous of all declarations of homosexual love: 'I am distressed for thee, my brother, Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me; thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women'" (35). Although the author tried to disguise the content of the epigraph, once the reader has deciphered the reference and found the actual passage, it becomes clear that the epigraph sets up the story as one that will convey the power of a man's passion for another man, a love that will surpass the love of a woman.

Continuing the pattern established with the epigraph to mask the queer relationship between the brothers, Borges portrays the Nilsens as hyper-masculine men who inspire fear and admiration among the inhabitants on the plains--"[m]alquistarse con uno era contar con dos enemigos" (*Brodie* 19). But several details indicate that the Nilsen brothers are not at all like the other men of the region. First of all, their peculiar nature makes them unusually removed and antisocial: no one dares intrude on their privacy and they never let people into their house

because the brothers "defendían su soledad" (*Brodie* 18). Furthermore, they are of an uncertain ethnic lineage which makes them appear physically different. The narrator concludes that it is this physical difference, as well as "*lo que ignoramos*, ayuda a comprender lo unidos que fueron" (*Brodie* 19; emphasis added). What makes them distant, what makes them so odd, but above all, what makes them so close, is due to something we do not and cannot know. Given the context of the rest of the story, however, the narrator's feigned ignorance appears to be a clear case of not being able to name explicitly the "peccatum illud horribile, inter christianos non nominandum," that is, same-sex desire, the love/sin that dare not speak its name.

It is significant that immediately following the acknowledgment that the narrator is unaware of what causes the two men to be so attached to each other, he mentions their sexual activities: it is known that their "episodios amorosos" have only ever been sexual encounters with prostitutes. It becomes clear that the brothers have never courted a woman with whom they could consider maintaining a long-term relationship or with whom they could satisfy the heteropatriarchal dictate of marriage. So when Cristián brings the prostitute Juliana Burgos home to live with them, his intention is not to form a heterosexual bond, but rather to acquire a live-in maid ("[e]s verdad que ganaba así una sirvienta"), and more importantly, to be able to show her off as his companion when he goes out in public ("la lucía en las fiestas") (*Brodie* 19). This second use of Juliana as a visible heterosexual partner--a "beard"--is quite necessary to deflect the accusations of homoerotic desire between the brothers that may have already been circulating around the region. The fact that people are talking about the Nilsen's queer relationship is suggested by a coded phrase: "[e]l barrio... previó con alevosa alegría la *rivalidad latente* de los hermanos" (*Brodie* 20; my emphasis). The "latent" passion between the brothers that superficially may appear to outsiders as a "rivalry" for the love of the woman is, at a deeper level, a rivalry between the brothers for the love of each other.

But the most valuable use of Juliana, however, is her role as a sexual intermediary between the brothers. She is the third point of the love triangle and as such, "[s]he... has no

intrinsic value, her value is the result of the mediator's, the other's prestige. Cristián desires her because Eduardo does and viceversa" (Magnarelli 144). So as the brothers share her, connecting man-to-man through her body, Juliana loses any identity as a human being and becomes a mere sexual apparatus that permits the two men to have intimate physical relations with each other without actually engaging in male-male sexual intercourse. Their understanding of the true nature of their relationship emerges when, as Keller and Van Hooft demonstrate, "Juliana comes to serve as a catalyst and a foil for a more profound intrusion--the emergence of a conscious awareness of fraternal love, an awareness which is intolerable to the brothers" (305). This frightening knowledge, as Balderston points out, is "what Sedgwick and others have called 'homosexual panic'" (35), the startling realization that a man's relationship to another man could be construed as homoerotic and must, therefore, reveal (unconscious) homosexual desire.

Their triangular desire--"aquel monstruoso amor" (*Brodie* 22)--, however, becomes so overwhelming that the brothers must find a release from the tension it causes. After a long discussion, the two men decide to sell Juliana to a brothel and in that way they may succeed in eliminating the instrument that makes their physical love possible and in calming their feelings of guilt and shame. This response, however, does not solve the problem. Their need to connect through her grows more powerful than the fear of acknowledging their homosexual passion for each other. As a result, the brothers are forced to buy her back from the brothel and take her home again after they visit her repeatedly in an attempt to recreate the erotic structure that once united them. With the retrieval of Juliana, the initial state of homophobic panic has given way to a stage in which the two brothers come to accept their desire for each other and their need to bond. The final step, the true union of the two brothers, however, will require the elimination of Juliana.

Critics have offered several different explanations for the conclusion of the tale and its significance. McMurray asserts that the Nilsens murder Juliana as a Christ-like sacrifice "to atone for their 'sin' of love" (144). Following Lima's conclusion that in killing the woman,

Cristián "has confronted the erotic 'demon' in himself and executed it," opting "for the fraternal rather than for the sexual bond" (415), Magnarelli claims that the brothers kill the woman as a sacrificial substitution so that they do not kill each other[12] and in so doing, "Cristián eliminates his own and his brother's sexuality by destroying the woman, the object of that desire" and that "[b]y killing a female the male character is negating the feminine, the female in himself" (148).

But these and other interpretations[13] fail to take into account the strength of the passion between the two brothers, which, as the epigraph reminds us, "passes the love of women." Cristián kills Juliana, not because he despises this particular woman or his inner femininity, but rather because as long as Juliana exists as an impediment that keeps the brothers from realizing fully their homoerotic desires, the two men will never be able to connect to each other directly. The men have outgrown their need for an intermediary and need to move beyond a relationship with a communal woman as surrogate to a relationship with the true object of their desire. In order to accomplish this, they must remove the obstacle that keeps them apart. In the murder of Juliana, the brothers actually find the link that will bind them together forever: "Se abrazaron, casi llorando. Ahora los ataba otro vínculo: la mujer tristemente sacrificada y la obligación de olvidarla" (*Brodie* 23).

An essential feature of the fiction of Borges is its essential evasiveness. As Molloy puts it, there is a "nonfixity, accompanied by its tenuous longing for what is fixed," an "oscillation between fixity and mobility," a shiftiness, a fragmentation, a "fundamental textual restlessness," a blurring that demonstrates "Borges' pleasure in deviating from the simplest rules of the narrative game" (2-4). In addition to Borges' well-known blurring of the distinctions between essay and fiction, reality and dream, historical fact and creative fancy, "El muerto" and "La intrusa" illustrate another type of blurring: the blurring of sexuality between the homosocial and the homosexual, the heterosexual and the queer.

While Borges' fictional world may be an unquestionably homosocial space, populated by men whose passion for other men involves such emotions as intimate friendship, macho rivalry, violent jealousy, passionate admiration, and so forth, his stories "El muerto" and "La intrusa" show that it can also be a very queer space as well. What these two stories have in common is the use of a triangular structure of desire to subvert heterosexist assumptions that depend upon the singular and unequivocal meaning of sexual behavior, orientation, and identity. As I have shown, different-sex activity does not effectively negate the possibility that a man may be expressing his homoerotic desire through sexual intercourse with a woman. Benjamín Otálora and the Nilsen brothers demonstrate that ostensibly "heterosexual" sex can actually be deceptively queer. The women in these stories serve to display only the *appearance* that they and the men are fulfilling the mandates of "compulsory heterosexuality," while underneath the façade of sex between males and females, Borges' texts cunningly suggest the fulfilment of homoerotic desires.

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NOTES

[1]I do not share Magnarelli's conclusion with regard to the meaning of "triangular desire" when she finds that the female of the triangle, a mere empty vessel embodying the projected desires of the men, serves as an *arbitrary* sacrificial victim when the humiliation caused by "desire" becomes too powerful and must be eliminated. She goes on to emphasize the arbitrary nature of the female of the triangle by neutralizing the specificity of her gender: in Borgesian fiction, "one of the salient feature of his prose is the indistinction between his portrayals of males and females" and that "his characters are not often meant to be seen as representative of one sex or the other but rather as human beings" (149). I cannot concur, therefore, with those critical works that view Borges' characters as "generic" humans or intellectual abstractions (see Hughes, Carter, and Molloy) because this view tends to neutralize the very important differences between the way Borges characterizes males and females. While the characters in Borges' stories may or may not have fully "rounded" human personalities, they *always* have gender. And in the Borgesian universe, gender distinctions are used to place males in a privileged and central position while females are subservient to male prerogatives and ordinarily function as instruments in male development.

[2]Until quite recently, given the fact that Borges never actually describes any act of sex between men, critics have consistently asserted that all male-male interaction in the fiction of Borges cannot possibly be considered anything other than purely homosocial--an interaction that serves to exalt the chaste purity and nobility of the friendship and camaraderie among males. For most critics, sexuality in this context is inconceivable. Robert Lima, for example, insists that for Borges, sex appeals to "man's lower nature" (415) and as a result, the author "intends that eroticism be subverted" (417).

[3]It should be noted that the adjectives "queer" and "homosexual" refer to distinct conceptualizations. "Homosexual" has come to indicate a psycho-medical category of sexual identity based on "object-choice"--an exclusive erotic desire for others of the same sex. "Queer," however, refers to sexuality that is anti- or non-heterosexual and aims at the rejection of the labelling of desires according to strict identity definitions and binary opposites. For more on the contemporary meanings of "queer," see Stein and Plummer 181-82, Seidman 173-74, and Berlant and Warner.

[4]Reference to the stories will be noted in the text by the abbreviated title of the volume in which they appear (*Aleph* for "El muerto" and *Brodie* for "La intrusa") followed by the page number.

[5]It has been noted that violence leading to death is an all too common outcome of male interaction in Borges' stories. The view that this violence may be the result of (homo)erotic desire is hinted at in Ariel Dorfman's landmark 1968 essay, "Borges and American Violence." In exploring why violent death is linked to the revelation that gives meaning to human existence, Dorfman concludes that "[t]he desire for death is not grounded in the needs of metaphysical revelation in Borges: If the character desires that moment it is because in it he finds his own tearing apart, his other, the one who must kill him or make him die, the double who is both feared and loved, that being who is found deep inside each one of us, ready to destroy or be destroyed" (34). In a more recent essay, Balderston makes the connection explicit: "homoeroticism is coded in violent contact between men, particularly in the important leitmotiv of the knife fight" (39).

[6]Borges' own characterization of male-male sex as an "inimaginable contacto" is carefully and insightfully examined by Balderston to show that by means of an exacting and systematic

suppression of any overt reference to homosexuality in his works, Borges betrays his own fascination for the topic.

[7]It is surprising that critics have not commented on the name of the woman in this story, Juliana Burgos, especially considering that Borges' use of symbolic names is so well documented. The name "Juliana" repeats the initial consonants of "Jorge Luis" and is coupled with "Burgos," the Castillian form of the Portuguese "Borges." It would seem that the author is using his own name, in a slightly altered form, for the communal woman in this story, thereby making a direct link between himself and a female character who is the sexual intermediary between two men.

[8]In the prologue to *El informe de Brodie*, Borges declares that in this collection, "he intentado, no sé con qué fortuna, la reducción de cuentos directos" (*Brodie* 9-10). He further emphasizes that these stories "son realistas, para usar la nomenclatura hoy en boga" and that he has "renunciado a las sorpresas de un estilo barroco" (*Brodie* 11).

[9]The possibility of a radical appropriation of different-sex activity for queer purposes should dispel the commonly held heterosexist assumption that sex between a male and a female automatically affirms an essential and permanent heterosexual identity for the partners. A male character's "sexual object-choice" of a female, does not determine beyond doubt that the character is, by definition, exclusively and fundamentally heterosexual. Furthermore, it must be noted that the issue of object-choice as a determinant of sexual orientation is a concept that has never been applicable to Hispanic culture. With this in mind, although Otálora in "El muerto" and the Nilsen brothers in "La intrusa" have sexual intercourse with a woman, the ultimate object of their desire is, clearly, another man.

[10]Lima goes on to assert that "Borges has concerned himself with heterosexual relations to the exclusion of other types. Neither bestiality nor forms of homosexuality are visible in his published works to date; indeed, he has chosen to avoid altogether what society currently terms deviate sexual behavior, regardless of caste" (417). Although this study was written over twenty years ago, at a time when sensitivity to non-heteronormative sexuality was quite uncommon, Lima's placement of "bestiality" alongside "homosexuality" as two examples of "deviate sexual behavior" that, according to him, do not appear in Borges' writing, still has a very jarring effect. It is an interesting reminder that until very recently, unrelated categorizations of non-heteronormative sexuality could be lumped together indiscriminately, with the implication that any forms of "deviate" sexuality are equivalent.

[11]In 1979, Carlos Hugo Christensen directed a film version of "La intrusa" in which the Nilsen brothers are played by "pretty blonds" (Balderston 36) and whose homoerotic desires are made explicit. In one scene, while Juliana lies between them, the brothers fondle and kiss each other and ultimately reach orgasm. Borges' reaction to the film was dramatic. According to Alifano, Borges was so outraged that "casi inmediatamente me dictó un artículo que tituló *La censura* donde a pesar de pronunciarse en contra de esa arbitrariedad tan usual de los gobiernos totalitarios, la aprobaba en el caso específico de la película basada en su cuento" (162). As Balderston astutely suggests, Borges' reaction to the film can only be described as a "homosexual panic."

[12]Stabb finds that the suggestion of a Cain and Abel relationship between the brothers casts a sinister shadow on the "true circumstances surrounding the older brother's death" (86). Although he does not expand on this thesis, Stabb views the story primarily as a tale of fraternal jealousy and rivalry that leads to fratricide. Unfortunately, Stabb does not seem to consider an important detail made explicit by the narrator: because of their *love for each other*, the two always turn

their anger *away* from their brother and onto others: "Caín andaba por ahí, pero el cariño entre los Nilsen era muy grande... y prefirieron desahogar su exasperación con ajenos. Con un desconocido, con los perros, con la Juliana..." (*Brodie* 22).

[13]Keller and Van Hooft, whose 1976 study at first contains many valuable insights, provides the most distressing interpretation of the story. They conclude that Juliana is merely a test of the brothers' psychological development--a test that they fail miserably. According to Keller and Van Hooft, the Nilsens live in a juvenile state of psychological indifferentiation which they must overcome "in order to attain heterosexual maturity" (314). The murder of Juliana, then, demonstrates that they have failed to develop "correctly" and have returned to an "unconscious unity": "In a sense it is the fate of these brothers to be 'yoked' to each other like oxen---they are melded. And just as oxen are altered studs, the brothers are not permitted entry into the mature heterosexuality of the adult world" (315). The critics' heterosexist conclusion, reiterates the chauvinistic assumptions in psychoanalysis that psychological maturity is achieved solely through heterosexual desire and that homosexuals, consequently, are condemned to a state of infantile immaturity.

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